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ABSTRACT

The process of developing informational prospectuses to convey information to prospective students at 11 institutions is illustrated by the experiences at three different institutions: a public university in California; a state university in an Oregon metropolis; and a large, two-campus, suburban community college in Michigan. These case studies are used to highlight some of the problem issues that emerged at most of the 11 institutions, including: (1) providing institutional leadership; (2) developing techniques necessary for significant involvement of campus constituencies and for resolution of resulting tensions; (3) choosing information significant to prospective students; and (4) ensuring the accuracy of data. Specific types of difficulties encountered at the 11 institutions and institutional changes that seemed attainable to the creation of the new information document are discussed. (SPG)

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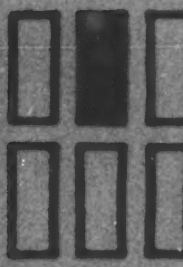

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THE PROCESS
OF
PROSPECTUS BUILDING

Joan S. Stark and John C. Hoy

National Task Force on Better Information

for

Student Choice

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THE PROCESS OF PROSPECTUS BUILDING

Joan S. Stark and John C. Hoy

The National Task Force on Better Information for Student Choice engaged fifteen postsecondary institutions and agencies in a voluntary effort to provide improved information which may assist students in selecting among colleges and vocational schools. The Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education supported the project over a two-year period from 1975 to 1977. The Task Force was formed by The Fund in recognition of the fact that lack of adequate information is sometimes a barrier to educational opportunity for all citizens.

While four "resource agencies" investigated broad questions related to student information needs, educational outcomes and comparability of information among institutions, each of eleven "demonstration" institutions attempted to devise a unique "prospectus" -- a new means to convey information to prospective students. The tangible evidence of "prospectus-building" comes in many forms -- prospectuses were designed as glossy viewbooks, not-so-glossy viewbooks, program brochures, mimeographed guidebooks and slide-tape presentations. Each prospectus was designed to meet the needs of a single institution and was intended to serve as a prototype of better information as well as to be used by students considering attending that institution.

The process of developing informational prospectuses was a learning experience for the institutions that were members of the Task Force. Some of these experiences, as reported by campus project directors, are

summarized here as support for others on campuses where experimentation with improved types of information is viewed as valuable. We have selected certain issues which appear to have been both common and important and have chosen to illustrate these through comments on the process of developing informational prospectuses at three different institutions: a public university in California; a state university located in an Oregon metropolis; and a large two-campus suburban community college in Michigan. The perceptions included here were those of the campus project directors just prior to the conclusion of the project; another paper will discuss campus impact at a later date after the new materials have been in use for about a year.

While the primary goal of Task Force activities at each demonstration institution was to present more complete and accurate information to prospective students in order to facilitate better student-institutional match, the scope and nature of the process differed considerably in the various demonstration schools. Some schools concentrated primarily on building an information document that would contain material of great importance in student decisionmaking but which had been missing from previous informational bulletins. For example, the community colleges felt a strong need to describe more completely their occupational programs, including employment outcomes for graduates. Other schools, such as the small liberal arts colleges, found it more feasible to develop a comprehensive document that would more accurately represent the entire institution. Three public universities attempted to structure documents which would depict the wide diversity of environments -- either academic or nonacademic -- that

students might encounter on campus. Offering a slightly different perspective, proprietary vocational schools tried to develop an accurate document stressing their unique strengths in preparing students for occupations.

Despite the varying scope and nature of the individual projects, the process included, in most cases, the following steps:

RESEARCH STAGE

1. identification of the types of information the school was already providing
2. determination of existing gaps between the information provided and what students wish to know, as well as what employers, parents and various college groups believe students should know

PRODUCTION STAGE

1. assessment of data available to fill the gaps identified
2. generation of new data or utilization of existing data in new ways
3. compilation of the information into a form deemed suitable for students

FEEDBACK STAGE

1. consultation with various segments of the college and external community regrading the content and format of the draft documents
2. pilot testing of the information on samples of prospective students

Although not every one of the eleven demonstration institutions followed each of these steps in the order given, the list describes, in general, the method by which information documents were built. A variety of process issues emerged in most institutions:

* What type of leadership should be provided within the institution to ensure a successful experiment with new information?

* What techniques are necessary for significant involvement of campus constituencies and resolution of resulting tensions?

* What assurance can be obtained that data are supported by verifiable facts?

* Is it possible to develop information which is increasingly comparable to that available from other institutions?

PROVIDING INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP

An official prospectus to be published by a college or university usually will require broad-based review of an advisory committee comprised of the major elements of the campus organization. At the same time, responsibility, authority, and accountability for such a project should be vested in a single senior administrative officer who can both provide direction and make the final and tough decisions regarding content, editing and format.

To provide adequate administrative machinery for developing an initial prospectus, the senior campus officer can be assisted best by professionals with sufficient time allocated to the intense work

and coordination required. One should be a writer, responsible for drafting the raw material collected and translating it into language that is understandable, informative and keyed to student interests and needs. A research associate experienced in data collection, including the administration and interpretation of survey instruments, might summarize the findings for the director, writer and advisory committee and conduct whatever additional research is necessary to support the project.

CASE STUDY - UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE

The responsibility for the development of the UC Irvine Prospectus rested with the Vice Chancellor for University and Student Affairs, who is one of the four senior administrators. He oversees the offices of Development; Relations with Schools and Colleges; Financial Aid; Career Planning and Placement; Grants, Studies and Research; Student Health; and Counseling and Special Services, as well as the Dean of Students' Office.

Having a senior administrator with such broad-based authority as the project director enhanced the decision making process for the UCI project. For example, the variety of internal and external writers and educators who served as advisors for the project were unsuccessful in reaching consensus regarding the "tone" of the language to be used in the Prospectus. The issue was resolved when the Vice Chancellor considered the input, took into account the distinctiveness and mission of the University and made a decision. His clarification of the issue was easily accepted by the participants and allowed them to work toward a common goal knowing that the focus would not be changed by a more senior administrator.

The Vice Chancellor also served as the administrative link between the University and Student Affairs staff and the Academic Affairs personnel, ensuring that a representative from Academic Affairs met regularly with the project staff to advise on and approve Prospectus material relating to the campus' academic character. This relationship with Academic Affairs proved to be extremely worthwhile since the final draft of the Prospectus, when reviewed by the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, required only three minor revisions.

A senior administrator acting as project leader also has the advantage of access to a large pool of available supportive resources. For instance, when necessary, the Vice Chancellor was able to approve release time for specialized staff enabling them to devote full attention to the project. He was also able to approve additional contributed funding for the Prospectus.

Working for the Vice Chancellor was a project manager who was responsible for the day-to-day supervision of the project. Because of the data-based nature of the Prospectus, it was necessary for the project manager to have research experience as well as administrative ability. The project manager coordinated the efforts of the writer and five student interns as well as the internal and external advisory boards.

CASE STUDY - PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

At Portland State University, leadership for the Better Information Project came from the Director of Institutional Research. The impetus to

develop better information for prospective students, however, arose several years earlier from the Director of Admissions, the Dean of Students, the Office of Academic Affairs and the Director of Communications.

These early leadership efforts accelerated the degree to which information about the campus was more effectively collected and shared. The move away from more subjective public relations types of information toward objective data-based information also began. In addition, there was an attempt to diversify information to meet the needs of the variety of students on the campus and to provide better delivery of existing information. This focus was essential for an urban commuter institution.

Location of the project in the institutional research office stimulated the collection of survey data, including student opinion. Close coordination with academic affairs resulted in a new publication entitled, A Guide to Undergraduate Learning Opportunities in which academic program areas tried to be more specific about their offerings.

CASE STUDY - MACOMB COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

At Macomb County Community College, an open-door, two-campus institution of about 25,000 commuting students near Detroit, impetus for the better information project came from the Public Information Committee. This group, composed largely of staff from student services, admissions and public relations offices and including a representative of the president's office, had noted with concern a lack of information about costs and employment outcomes they believed essential to the heterogeneous student applicant pool. At the same time they sensed, both locally and nationally, a tendency

of students to ask more challenging and probing questions about educational outcomes.

The Dean of Students, also chairman of the initiating committee and supervisor of service areas such as admissions and financial aid on the larger of the two campuses, assumed the task of project direction. Committee members possessed the authority to revamp the college's public relations effort as well as the ability to stimulate interest in the project among numerous college offices. A merger from two separate campuses to one dual-campus comprehensive institution took place during the project period; both old and new presidents were interested in and supportive of the effort. In submitting the college's request for assistance to The Fund, the former president stated:

> "It is the College's intention to disclose all information about the institution that may help the potential student. Should any person or persons at the College feel that any of this information misrepresents his interests, that person or persons may appeal and will receive, before any information is distributed to the public, a hearing at which he can present proof to the contrary."

With the strength of that support, Macomb undertook to present to prospective students specific information on the benefits and costs of education by program, an analysis of possible careers by career ladders and a full disclosure of financial aid practices and policies. Considerable logistical support was provided by the college's extremely sophisticated data processing system which included information on a wide variety of educational programs and outcomes.

CAMPUS INVOLVEMENT AND RESULTING TENSIONS

Student and faculty representatives, as well as external advisors, can be used profitably to comment on the development of the prospectus. Their input ensures that representative views are taken into account in the process of producing a final publication that will accurately represent the campus to prospective students. Their involvement also reduces the concern about the risks of disclosing more information about the campus and its programs. In developing a representative committee, it should be remembered that differing perspectives and orientations are being built into the process and will ultimately have to be resolved by the senior administrator in charge if consensus cannot be established.

For example, tension may exist as a result of fragmented authority on campuses between different divisions responsible to different constituencies. While the student affairs division is commonly oriented to students' needs, the academic affairs division may be primarily responsive to faculty interests and the overall academic image of the campus. Synthesizing these differing interests for purposes of developing an information document requires skillful consultation to avoid jeopardizing support for the project. On some campuses professors may wish to maintain the prerogative of writing course descriptions and other material concerning academic activities. On still other campuses, particularly public community colleges, the information to be included in a prospectus, and even the composition of an advisory group for prospectus building, could become a topic of negotiation. Depending upon union-administration relationships, this process could either garner support

for or detract from the provision of better information to students.

Student affairs staff customarily view themselves as advocates for students, and are more eager to provide maximum information to applicants. They may extend this advocacy to the point where they lose sight of data priorities and the need to balance candor with an effective institutional presentation calculated to reach a broad audience of prospectus readers. Admissions officers may be concerned about deemphasizing campus weak points, particularly where pressures for student recruitment are strong, while institutional researchers may overemphasize presentation of statistics which are too technical for a general audience.

Such generalizations are, of course, over-simplistic. But a perspective reflecting the higher interests and responsibilities of the college, built upon a coalition of campus interests, is needed to construct a publication which is responsive to the needs of prospective students.

While students involved in prospectus construction customarily press for maximum disclosure, they tend to be loyal to the institution and to recognize that, in the final analysis, the prospectus is an informational device intended to produce a positive effect on the reader. Student interns, assistants, or committee members involved in the project may expect that their ideas, research and writing will carry heavy weight in a publication designed for prospective students. To avoid frustration and unrealized expectations on the part of student workers, their role and significance to the project should be carefully defined at the outset. Student sensitivities, experiences and judgments about their campus and the effectiveness of the prospectus can provide a valuable frame of

reference for the development of the ultimate draft, but in the final analysis, a professional writer must author and the project director must take responsibility for its content.

CASE STUDY - UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE

At UCI participants in the project were selected from all areas of the campus community. The internal advisory board was composed of key administrators, faculty and staff as well as student interns. An external advisory board included the Dean of Admissions from a private university, the Vice Chancellor of a local community college, the President of a northern California community college, a high school principal, high school and community college counselors, and two education editors from West Coast publications.

All of these individuals were involved with developing a taxonomy of appropriate data and the final Prospectus. Their diversity allowed for a great variety of opinions and ideas. Perhaps because of this, both the internal and external advisory boards encountered a degree of tension and frustration while at work on the project.

One of the major areas of frustration involved clarification of roles for advisory board members. Unfortunately, the "advisory boards," especially the external board members, attempted to act as decision-makers rather than input providers. Because of the diversity of the people on the board, no consensus about the project could be reached, resulting in extensive frustration. Better and continuous communication by the project manager about the board members' respective roles and their importance to the process of prospectus building was necessary.

The internal board, comprised of faculty and staff, consistently was supportive of the project. Members offered a useful perspective and understanding of the University which the external board did not have. The main question of risk encountered was whether the Prospectus would, indeed, provide more effective information for prospective students or whether it might result in a publication detrimental to UCI. This question was raised often.

The involvement of five student interns with the project also caused some problems, resulting from a misunderstanding of roles. Students actually wrote sections of the Prospectus draft and submitted them to the "master writer." Unfortunately, this raised the expectations of students, even though it had been clearly stated at the outset of the project that the written work of the interns would be edited. In retrospect, the students' input would have been more effectively utilized if they had primarily collected input data for the writer. Student review and revision of written copy was effective but the use of a master writer to edit and write the Prospectus narrative, proved to be the best method for creating a stylistically cohesive end product.

CASE STUDY - PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

The potential risk of "disclosing" better information was never an issue at Portland State University; the need and the intent were clear. One main problem was to determine in what form the information could most effectively be delivered. Originally, a large number of mini-pamphlets (on financial aid, housing, programs) constituted the information program.

New information from the project has been incorporated into these pamphlets as well as into the prospectus, Introduction to Portland State. A second major problem concerned the allocation of dollars for such an extensive project.

To achieve cooperation and input, participants for the project were selected from all key administrative offices including Publications, Dean of Students, Office of Admissions, Office of Articulation, Office of Evaluation, Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Division of Continuing Education, Placement Office, Financial Aid and the Veteran's Office. Exceptionally close communication was maintained with Admissions and the Publications Staff and contact with faculty was facilitated by the Dean of Undergraduate Studies and the Vice President for Academic Affairs. These faculty and staff members held positions on the established Admissions and Recruitment Committee and therefore had previous experience with issues regarding information and dissemination. Additionally, a media specialist was hired for the project to help write and edit the publications. Students were extensively involved with a needs assessment survey phase of the project and were also responsible for the review phase. Assistance and objective input was solicited from local high school counselors and community college advisors.

CASE STUDY-MACOMB COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The philosophy of community service contributed to the success of the prospectus building effort at Macomb. The college has been growing and the tasks of admissions personnel are to bring information about college services to the entire community and to facilitate educational plans; there is little pressure for additional recruitment for its own sake.

The advisory committee included two students, staff members in the areas of public relations and student services, public representatives such as a stockbroker, the public relations director of a local shopping mall and veteran's group representatives, as well as two high school counselors. The committee members accepted their role as advisory and they provided valuable input about the needs and possible reactions of community groups; the project staff reserved the right to make final decisions about prospectus content and format. Although the project effort identified a number of institutional inconsistencies and problems, the advisory committee remained supportive. Several important decisions were stimulated from the data collection effort: significant changes were made in the method of awarding financial aid packages; advertising ceased for programs already filled to capacity; and weak employment opportunities were candidly noted for what had been viewed as strong academic and career programs.

Extremely important in the success of prospectus building at Macomb were periodic progress briefings for student organization leaders and regular information columns in both student and faculty newsletters. Although neither individual faculty members nor the faculty union representatives were directly involved, they tended to be supportive because of awareness created through existing communications channels.

CHOOSING INFORMATION SIGNIFICANT TO STUDENTS

In general, colleges have utilized in their publications an institutional perspective based on what they think prospective applicants

should be permitted to know about their campuses, rather than a perspective based on what students need to know. Finding out what students need to know and, indeed, what they want to know, requires surveys of such audiences as incoming students, enrolled students, recent alumni and parents of students. The necessary survey research need not be exhaustive nor overly expensive to administer, but it does require a commitment by the institution to develop a data base geared to the interests of potential students.

Considerable research done by Task Force institutions regarding what students need to know has been completed. Needs of students appear to be relatively consistent, at least for similar types of institutions. Also, systematic findings have appeared regarding differences between what prospective students still in high school feel is important and what enrolled students believe. Nevertheless, there are advantages for institutional self-study and public relations when each college makes at least a limited survey of its own. In particular, the marked changes which have occurred in higher education in the last decade indicate that highly current data must be gathered with respect to the needs of adults, women and minority students.

CASE STUDY - UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE

The Prospectus developed at UCI focuses on that information which is necessary to acquaint students with the character and life style of the campus. This includes information related to student characteristics, educational programs, satisfaction, productivity, and subsequent careers.

Early in the project, it became clear that UCI applicants prefer a published guide written in clear, concise, and straightforward language.

Films, video cassettes, slide shows and other novelties were found to have far less appeal.* Project staff at UCI found that there is no more need to "write down" to students than there is to write in the jargon of educators. Students merely seek intelligible information that will assist them in making decisions about postsecondary education.

Readily available research instruments were used at Irvine to organize a data bank which could accurately portray the campus environment. The Survey of Incoming Freshman of the American Council on Education was used to develop profiles of the entering class, including its demongraphic characteristics, educational and career expectations, and attitudes about society. These data were used for descriptive purposes in the Prospectus and at the same time formed a data base for later assessment of how students are affected by their college experiences.

UCI administered the Educational Testing Service's College and University Environment Scales (CUES) to determine upperclass student perceptions of the campus atmosphere. A representative sampling of students from all academic schools and programs was taken to assess attitudes about scholarship, community, campus morale, and faculty-student relationships. The findings were used primarily to portray the campus as enrolled students see it, but additionally they will help plan programs that can improve the quality of student life at the university.

Since many of the CUES questions have become dated, the problem of timeliness was partially resolved by drawing upon the more recent Institutional Goals Inventory (IGI), also published by ETS, to compare

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*The experiences of other institutions in the Task Force may differ.

attitudes of students, faculty and administrators regarding conditions on campus both as they are currently perceived and as respondents feel they ought to be. The Institutional Functioning Inventory (IFI), was used to measure intensity of attitudes of students, faculty and staff regarding the University's functional effectiveness.

Additional studies and surveys contributed to a data bank which formed the core of information for a Prospectus designed to up-grade the level of information available to students considering enrollment. Included in these were the College Student Questionnaires (CSQ), Parts I and II, which, when used at two points in time,can measure the impact of college on students. Also used were a variety of institutionally developed instruments and reports including two studies on attrition and a career survey that collected information on 51% of all previous bachelor degree recipients of UCI.

The creation of a data base from which to draw information for the Prospectus was followed by selection of that data which would best meet the needs of prospective UCI students. A taxonomy of informational needs was developed by UCI faculty, students and staff as well as external advisors from California. The taxonomy provided a structure for arranging and clarifying data which would be most appropriate for the project. That information deemed inappropriate for prospective students was found to be suitable for a handbook designed for students who had actually chosen to attend UCI.

A abundance of information was collected on the composition and attitudes of the student body, as well as on the distinguishing features of the campus as seen through the eyes of its constituents. However, the value of the Prospectus presentation depended upon the attitude and

judgment exercised by decision makers in determining which of these data were most relevant and yet "safe" enough to publish without serious internal dissension.

A specific problem of this nature arose regarding attrition information. While current quantitative data on the extent of attrition were available, qualitative data concerning the reasons students left UCI were five years old; half the age of the institution. Some advisors agrued in favor of utilizing the out-of-date material simply because it provided some information. Others, however, argued just as vigorously against using the data. Ultimately, a compromise was reached by presenting in the Prospectus only those reasons students gave for leaving UCI, not the actual attrition percentages nor the percentage for each reason. In this way, at least some information about attrition was provided for prospective students but unfortunately it falls short of initial objectives. This problem has led UCI research staff to plan for an updated qualitative assessment of attrition at the campus.

CASE STUDY - PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

Based on results of student surveys developed by the Office of Institutional Research, University researchers found gaps between the information provided and that which they felt should be provided for prospective PSU students. Staff wanted to ensure that information would be available for a wide variety of prospective students, not only 18-21 year olds, who comprise less than one-third of the total student body, but for older students returning to continue their education.

Among the new information included in the Introduction to Portland State University was that regarding time to degree, alumni feedback about their education, current student satisfaction with support services, clarification of which services were provided for full time students only and those provided for part time students. Additional descriptive information about academic programs was developed for the new Learning Guide publication.

Data were collected by staff of the Office of Institutional Research which initiated several new studies on attrition and student satisfaction with support services. Additional data were gathered from the files of former students, while department heads developed the information about specific academic programs.

A significant outcome of the process of determining the gaps was the pulling together in one place of all the various information pieces distributed by each campus entity. This task allowed all of the involved campus departments to become aware of the overlaps as well as the gaps of PSU's information efforts.

The major problem encountered during the project concerned the amount of material to include in one publication, the Prospectus. Overwhelming students with a morass of statistics was judged to be undesirable. Deciding how much of the information to include in one publication was the subject of considerable debate among participants. There was also discussion about whether or not to include attrition data and salary information of PSU graduates.

Another tension which came about during the development stages of the PSU project concerned the actual writing style and format of the

document, Introduction to Portland State University, as well as who was responsible for what. Institutional Research staff members took over some activities usually handled by Publications, specifically the information development stages. The Publication staff restricted their role to editing, format development and those technical issues affecting publication of the document. Close communication helped to smooth out potential problems and, because so many offices were involved in information development, new roles and responsibilities were created which resulted initially in tension but ultimately in stronger inter-office relationships.

CASE STUDY-MACOMB COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The advice of the broad advisory committee was important in identification of student information needs at Macomb. High school counselors contributed an awareness of unmet needs of one group, community and veteran's representatives and members of the student services staff brought background derived from contacts with other groups. Additionally, Macomb utilized the research of other Task Force agencies, particularly Portland State University, the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and the College Scholarship Service. The extensive research of these agencies was judged sufficiently generalizable to supply basic assumptions about student information needs, providing local factors are also considered.

One important local factor is that follow-up of graduates is less important for the comprehensive community college than is information

about former students who may only have taken one or two courses to meet specific needs. "Stop-ins" and part time students are encouraged at Macomb where only about 13% of the enrolled students complete a degree program. It was initially believed that community college students need information which would enable them to weigh college attendance against employment. After further investigation of this issue, it was determined that few students felt the concept of "foregone income" to be crucial. Rather they need information about costs and aid sufficient to incorporate both into a total budget plan which includes part time school attendance and employment in optimum proportions for academic success and family financial stability.

Thus, Macomb's new prospectus contains detailed costs, including books, tuition and other fees, for each course as well as for total degree programs. The cost matrix was generated in a form which can be updated by computer in succeeding years. The prospectus also contains patterns of financial aid awards for students with varying budgets and extensive information about employment patterns in various careers.

ENSURING THE ACCURACY OF DATA

Data which might be included in a prospectus falls into two main categories: that which is easily gathered in quantitative form from institutional records to answer the "how many" and "how much" questions, and that which emerges from the perceptions of persons on the campus and is therefore open to different interpretations.

Verification of the first type of data often depends upon the

definitions used to generate it: for example, the date on which enrollments for a semester are established, whether a grading distribution should include courses taken on a pass-fail basis, or whether calculation of faculty-student ratio will include faculty who supervise internships or independent study. Once these definitions are clear, the information can readily be checked for accuracy.

Use of qualitative data requires discussion in an attempt to achieve consensus about what represents reality. Such information can never be presented in a form with which all will agree but various objective means can be used to sample student and staff opinion. To do so will sometimes result in surveying to demonstrate the obvious. Such efforts are profitable nevertheless, not only because they allow the sharing of opinion and the building of consensus but because sometimes what seems obvious turns out not to be so when careful assessment is made. Additionally, what is true for one group on the campus, particularly in large institutions, is not necessarily true for other groups. Adult students will perceive things differently than typical college age students. Similarly, commuting students will have different views from resident students. Some of the demonstration institutions have taken these differing perspectives into account when compiling material for the prospectuses. Such data cannot be verified in the usual sense but every effort can be made to take all factors into consideration.

Some demonstration institutions focused their attention only on data which could be quantified; thus verification was not a major problem. Others attempted to deal with the subjective information. In this latter group it was necessary to shelve some of the most controversial items for

further study rather than include them in a prospectus at this time. Even so, institutional self-study has begun.

CASE STUDY - UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE

Using the externally-developed instruments described earlier helped to ensure that the data input and national norms were accurate. Because total accuracy is virtually impossible to achieve in social science research, the project staff had planned to include in the introduction of the Prospectus a discussion of the limitations of social science research in general, and specifically the various limitations of each instrument used at UCI. Ultimately the decision was made to avoid this discussion because it was felt that it would only obscure the overall data presentation.

When information such as cost comparisons among postsecondary institutions, sources of institutional funds, and number of library volumes, was provided in the Prospectus it was verified separately by at least two members of the project staff. Although the process of checking and rechecking data was a time-consuming and often tedious task, verification of data utilized was crucial to both the effectiveness of the Prospectus and the credibility and reputation of the entire campus.

CASE STUDY - PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

The information collected for Introduction to Portland State University was compiled from responses to several institutionally developed survey instruments. Accuracy was ensured by checking and cross-checking data presented and by reexamining sample sizes. The participants involved in the project felt that it would be more effective to avoid a substantial

presentation of statistics. Thus, most information was presented in narrative form and all statements regarding policy and procedure (e.g., financial aid, admissions requirements, housing requirements) were verified by deans and directors.

CASE STUDY - MACOMB COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Comprehensive reports on the characteristics and needs of enrolled students, former students, and potential students were already available at Macomb. In reacting to the information to be included in the prospectus, the advisory committee contributed diverse viewpoints but did not recalculate or otherwise check the data. Rather the technique of verification was to collect extensive back-up data for every piece of information to go into the prospectus. This included previous financial aid awards and assessment of the actual cost to the student of every course offered at the college. Quantitative data presented was thus easily verified.

More difficulty was experienced with data from outside sources. It was discovered that labor projections obtained from state, local and national sources assumed no change in the state of the economy and thus could be misleading. Macomb's technique was to stress the assumptions behind such data and to supply in the prospectus the caveats the student would need for proper interpretation of employment trends. Salary ranges for graduates of specific programs represented another problem. Employers were not cooperative in supplying verification of trends obtained through student follow-ups.

For a description of another method of verifying the accuracy of data, see Stark, Joan S. and Theodore J. Marchese, "Auditing College Publications for Prospective Students," Journal of Higher Education, Jan/Feb, 1978.

DEVELOPING METHODS OF COMPARABILITY WITH OTHER COLLEGES

Information about colleges will be most useful to students if it enables them to make accurate comparisons concerning costs, campus climate and the educational programs of various colleges they may be considering. Since the ultimate aim of new information forms is better decision making on the part of students, eventual comparability of information is essential. Yet, little optimism is indicated in postsecondary education for generation of comparable information.

Comparability problems stem from the fact that information provided students is of two types: objective quantitative data and more subjective data which attempts to paint a picture of unique aspects of an institution. Progress has been made in presenting objective data in comparable form; examples include the CEEB College Handbook and similar publications. However, institutions are more resistant to attempts to compare more subjective institutional characteristics.

To expect national comparability, even for data which are readily quantified, may be presently unrealistic. But most institutions are aware of other colleges which students in their applicant pool commonly consider. Ordinarily, students consider several similar institutions as first choices for enrollment. Other institutions, either less expensive, less selective or closer to home, are considered as back-up choices. Efforts at comparability can begin with discussions among those institutions most often of interest to sizeable groups of applicants. Some success of this sort has already been achieved among groups of private institutions that have a single application form for a consortium,

and among public institutions within a state with a centralized bulletin and admissions procedures. Among private colleges the pressure to develop comparable data will probably result from two forces: peer group pressure when one institution publicizes its successful efforts in developing information, and the necessity to conserve resources which are increasingly being diverted into public relations efforts. Among public institutions, a firm commitment to comparability by top officials of central administrative units will be necessary, although local campuses within multicampus systems can take the opportunity to commit their own resources and to discuss their successes with colleagues on other campuses.*

CASE STUDY - UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE

By utilizing the externally developed instruments mentioned earlier, UCI researchers were able to present data for comparisons with national norms of similar postsecondary institutions. This included such information as student political views, study habits and educational objectives.

Researchers also gathered comparative information from published sources, for example, medical school acceptance rates from the Journal of Medical Education and employment oppotunities from the Occupation Manpower and Training Needs Bulletin. Information compiled by the system-wide offices of the University of California was also used. Examples of these include average SAT scores, per cent of freshmen required to enroll in a remedial English course (Subject A) and average undergraduate financial aid awards.

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* For a more extensive discussion see "Providing Comparable Information to Prospective Students: Issues, Problems, and Possible Solutions," by Oscar T. Lenning, Joan S. Stark and Patricia Wishart, available from CHOICE.

Finally, where appropriate, researchers were able to gather current data from other educational institutions to compare with UCI data. For example, data about the cost of education at UCI was compared to California State Universities and Colleges, California Institute of Technology, Pepperdine University, California Community Colleges and the University of Southern California.

All comparative and unique information in the Prospectus was presented as marginalia juxtaposed to the narrative. This was to allow the prospective student to look at either the narrative or the data as separate entities or to easily compare the two for a more complete picture.

CASE STUDY - PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

Because PSU did not have the information from other institutions necessary to present a comparison of institutional data, the issue of comparability was not encountered. This was found to be a less than optimal situation. In the future, PSU staff would like to develop some comparable information to communicate specific kinds of information more meaningfully to students (i.e., perceptions of the PSU environment, attrition information, graduates' experiences).

CASE STUDY - MACOMB COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The largely quantitative types of data included in the Macomb prospectus are more easily comparable that that included by some other

demonstration institutions. In fact, nine Michigan community colleges in the same geographic region have agreed to collect certain types of data about students in the same way. Four thousand local employers have agreed to cooperate with this group in reporting employment information. This project has been in progress for three years in response to the need for better information on the labor market and the Task Force activities represented for Macomb a refinement of information and an extension of previous efforts at comparability.

Typical student budgets and financial aid packages can also be presented comparably; the guidelines are generally the same across institutions. Macomb participated with other demonstration institutions in the College Scholarship Service project to agree on the best ways to present this information. Two factors remain somewhat troublesome in presenting a complete picture of institutional criteria for making financial aid decisions: 1) financial aid officers feel they need the flexibility to handle special cases, and 2) they fear that there is danger in making promises which the institution later finds it cannot fulfill. Such problems hinder comparability even when the attempt is accepted as sound in principle.

MAJOR STUMBLING BLOCKS IN PROSPECTUS CONSTRUCTION

While the brief case studies highlight some of the problem issues in prospectus building, project directors of all participating institutions were asked to comment further on specific types of difficulties. (See Table 1) Surprisingly, assessment of the risks involved in presenting more complete information to prospective students was not a major concern on

TABLE 1

MAJOR STUMBLING BLOCKS IN PROSPECTUS BUILDING

	Number of institutions reporting problem *		
	Frequently	Sometimes	Seldom or never
AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION NEEDED	2	5	2
ATTEMPTS TO INCLUDE TOO MANY GROUPS IN DELIBERATIONS	3	5	1
CONCERNS ABOUT THE RISKS INVOLVED IN PROJECT	1	8	0
WILLINGNESS TO RELEASE INFORMATION	1	7	1
CONFLICTS OF INTEREST ABOUT THE PURPOSE OF INFORMATION DISCLOSURE	1	5	3
QUESTIONS ABOUT THE NEED FOR THE PROJECT	0	5	4
INCLUSION OF TOO FEW GROUPS IN DELIBERATIONS	0	5	4

* Two institutions that did not approach prospectus building as a collaborative project are excluded from the analysis.

most campuses. While questions were sometimes asked about the need for new types of information or the purposes of full information disclosure, project directors reported that problems were not severe. Only one proprietary school indicated that such questions were asked "frequently." It seems likely that most questions of risk were resolved prior to the institutions' applications for participation in the National Task Force.

Willingness to release information was not viewed by project directors as a major hurdle. Yet, certain types of information were regarded by some groups on the campuses as either not important to prospective students or as information which would incur risk. The data most often mentioned were those pertaining to institutional attrition and attrition within particular programs. Attrition statistics were mentioned as a problem by five out of seven institutions which had tried to present them candidly. Resistance toward releasing attrition figures appears to have emanated from students and faculty as well as from administrators. There was strong consensus, on diverse campuses, that such figures must be accompanied by interpretations such as delineation of that proportion of the attrition rate which is caused by personal factors such as marriage, illness, family problems, rather than by dissatisfaction with the institution or its programs. Most institutions felt unprepared as yet to make such interpretations because their experience has demonstrated that reasons students in such circumstances report for withdrawal are often unreliable and because few recent normative figures are available about attrition.

The release of admissions and financial aid data met with resistance

in both a private college and a public college. This resistance appeared to be founded in concern that students would misinterpret the statistics or numerical distributions to the disadvantage of both themselves and the college.

In the case of the seven publically supported colleges which depend upon state funding allocations, there was little interest or discussion about presenting data concerning the financial soundness of the institution and thus no conflict arose. Financial soundness is a more threatening issue at private colleges and proprietary schools which depend heavily on enrollment income and endowments for survival. Therefore, disclosure of financial soundness, including net assets and liabilities, as well as surplus or deficits recently encountered, met with some resistance at private schools where attempts were made to include such information in the prospectus.

Clearly, institutions avoided the inclusion of some controversial information in their prospectuses. Institutions did not include, for example, student ratings of faculty; therefore the opportunity for discussion about this issue did not arise. However, Portland State University has such a project underway and a booklet has been published with full faculty and administrative support. Other institutions did include student views of the quality of various programs. Perhaps the acceptability of the idea of improved and more accurate information must be tested before complete candor can be achieved.

On the other hand, information which was frequently utilized and to which no major objections from campus constituencies were encountered included employment outcome measures and academic outcome measures, such as graduate record examination norms for individual programs. In one institution resistance to the use of student opinion survey data was

encountered from the students themselves.

In gathering employment and academic outcome data, as well as student opinion data, however, the project directors reported what seems to be the major stumbling block in their entire effort -- the availability of statistics. Only the proprietary institutions, which are small and have centralized procedures necessitated by balancing the books and conducting market research, reported that they had no difficulty in gathering data. Other institutions found that data needed were either not collected routinely, or were not readily usable in the prospectus. This required adjustment of the existing data base.

The extent of data problems varied. In one large university the project director was able to determine which new data were needed and direct subordinate offices to produce them without extensive discussion. Other colleges found that information about graduate school admissions, for example, required consultation and approval from academic departments and revitalization of their departmental records. In some cases, new data were difficult to obtain due to factors outside the control of the institution. For example, two community colleges discovered that responses to survey requesting salary data from recent graduates were limited and sometimes produced unrealistic figures. In addition, some found employers uncooperative in releasing figures on average salaries for recent graduates, making accurate salary statistics unobtainable.

While a variety of difficulties were encountered which depended upon the nature of individual projects, few seemed serious and only one, obtaining adequate data, occurred with regularity among the diverse institutions.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE STEMMING FROM PROSPECTUS BUILDING

Project directors in the demonstration institutions were also asked to assess institutional changes which seemed attributable to, but extended beyond,creation of the new information document. (See Table 2). It was difficult to determine cause and effect because changes toward better and more candid information had already been underway in most of the demonstration institutions before the project began. Nevertheless, project directors cautiously estimated that some examination of existing roles and relationships had taken place as a result of the intensive project, and that some relatively enduring changes had occurred. The types of change attributed to the project depended upon its scope and the office in which activities were centered. They depended too, on whether the project design involved many campus groups, upon the size of the institution and the nature of existing decision making structures.

In institutions where the Dean of Students was responsible, there tended to be extensive student involvement in the process of information selection; often the newly prepared materials focused most strongly on student life. In many of the participating institutions the Admissions Office reports to the Dean of Students, therefore relationships with

TABLE 2

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES ATTRIBUTED BY PROJECT DIRECTORS TO PROSPECTUS BUILDING PROCESS

	NUMBER OF INSTITUTIONS*					
	DEGREE OF IMPACT			SCOPE OF IMPACT		
	High	Moderate	Low or none	Broad	Moderate	Narrow
View of how college publications should be constructed in the future	7	2	0	6	2	1
Increased awareness of personnel toward professional responsibility in relation to students	6	1	2	2	6	1
Changes in types of data to be regularly collected about institutional programs and operations	5	1	3	2	3	4
Renewed attempts to analyze institutional strengths and weaknesses	4	1	4	3	3	3
Increased formalization of institutional policy for clearer presentation to students	2	3	4	1	3	5
Increased data sharing among offices and departments	4	1	4	3	2	4
Changed attitudes toward student-institutional relationships among administrative personnel	1	5	3	0	4	5
Institutional research function seen as more important	2	3	4	0	3	6
Changes in attitude toward institutional priorities	0	2	7	2	0	7

* Two institutions that did not approach prospectus building as a collaborative project have been excluded from the analysis.

feeder high schools and community groups also influenced the data gathered for the prospectus. When the institutional reseach office was the locus for project activities, the emphasis was more likely to be on the collection, coordination and use of data encompassing a wide variety of campus concerns, both academic and nonacademic.

There were distinct differences in the way projects were structured which appeared to stem from institutional size. In some large schools decisions about information were made primarily by administrators, making it less essential for many groups to be involved. As one project director at a large institution pointed out, "We didn't need to sell the project, we just gathered the data that were appropriate." In fact, in two major universities, project directors did not attempt to involve large numbers of campus groups in a collaborative enterprise. In one of these cases the administrator in charge had access to the data and worked with a small student advisory forum; in the other, the project, limited to a description of environments within the institution, was carried out by the project director with the assent, not the collaboration of, the university administration. In contrast, at smaller colleges, faculty and student committees actively participated in decisions regarding the prospectus and even authored some of the new material.

The proprietary institutions, although generally small and sparsely staffed, are similar to the universities in their centralization of decision making. Success of the project in these schools depended upon final decisions by the top executive and, in one case, upon relations with the advertising department.

Among the nine institutions where considerable collaboration took place were two medium-sized universities, two proprietary schools, three community colleges of varying size, and two private liberal arts colleges. These nine project directors were asked about institutional changes which fell into five major categories: 1) re-examination of roles and relationships among internal segments of the institution relating to the function of data collection; 2) re-examination of internal roles and relationships related to the dissemination of data; 3) relationships among internal and external groups; 4) analysis of institutional outcomes, goals, missions and priorities; 5) restructuring of decision making channels. Specifically, project directors were given a series of statements about potential changes and asked to judge whether change had occurred and if so, the extent of the impact of the project in bringing this change about. The two large universities which judged the survey inapplicable to their non-collaborative projects are excluded from the discussion which follows and from Table 2. These two project directors did expect that some impact would result when their prospectuses are released.

1. Reexamination of roles and relationships relating to data collection.

A number of project directors reported significant changes in the types of data to be regularly collected in the future. Prospectus building was judged of moderately high impact in stimulating new data bases; the highest impact was noted in community colleges. New or newly formatted data include: student opinions of institutional procedures and environments, follow-up studies of former students, and more specific data concerning academic and nonacademic programs, policies and procedures.

Schools that regularly collect a wide range of data concerning functions and outcomes were able to utilize this without establishing new collection procedures. Some reported that the institutional research function was now seen as more important since attempts to answer specific questions for prospective students have raised consciousness about data base gaps or collection procedures. One project director in a school with no institutional research office said, "I thought we should have such an office before the project began; now I'm more convinced that we need it." Some project directors believed that regular channels and customary data collection procedures should be utilized whereever they exist, making continuous updates of information possible, once initiated.

Although most institutions have attempted for the first time to collect more specific data concerning program information, employment outcomes and attrition rates, faculty appear to have been minimally involved as a group. In several institutions, a few faculty were members of advisory committees; in others, their major input was construction of program brochures. A contrast was evident between small non-unionized colleges where faculty involvement was more extensive, and large campuses with faculty unions where the project was deliberately reserved as a management endeavor.

2. Reexamination of roles and relationships relating to data dissemination.

Naturally Task Force activities had highest impact on the manner in which college publications are constructed. The next most significant change resulted from the discovery in several institutions

that much information was disseminated by various departments and offices with little central coordination. A student could receive conflicting information from different sources. The process of locating and centrally assembling this information, as well as developing guidelines for future coordination, has been a prominent activity in at least one school. This type of activity has emphasized the importance of communicating accurate information to all offices in frequent contact with students. As a group, the nine institutions report a moderate to high change toward increased inter-office data sharing; a continuing two-way communication process seems likely in the future.

Additionally, some schools discovered that policies are not always clearly formulated. Sometimes too, policies believed operational were found to have evolved into different informal procedures and understandings. Increased formalization of policies was noted on several campuses but project directors were unsure if this was attributable to prospectus building or to recent federal regulations and court decisions. The institutions as a group reported moderate but broadly based change toward clearer policy formulation but little increased centralization of policy decisions. One community college, however, discovered the same course offered at different tuition rates on its two campuses and found that students taking the same course from two instructors could pay disparate prices for books. "Being sensitive to the problems of accuracy," another project director said, "has approached a paranoid state. Everyone must initial every section of the prospectus materials; even the secretaries catch inconsistencies now as they type."

3. Relationships with internal and external constituencies.

Inadequate input was obtained from employer and community groups when questionnaires were used; response rate was typically low. But when external representatives were invited to join the deliberative groups, their enthusiastic presence was most helpful. Considerable influence was exercised by both internal and external groups when they were involved in decisions about information which should be included in the prospectus and as critics of emerging draft documents. In one instance, the presence of outsiders who asked "hard" questions reportedly caused institutional personnel to reexamine their positions and to join in unaccustomed solidarity. Another project director said, "I couldn't have gotten away with portraying an inaccurate picture of life on campus -- the students on the advisory committee were always on the ball." The process of prospectus building moved slowly, however, when many constituencies were involved. Several project directors felt too many groups were cumbersome.

Changes in relationships with external groups depended upon the extent to which their cooperation and advice was sought. One community college, one liberal arts college and two public universities reported changes in relationships with feeder high schools; only two institutions reported changed relationships with other colleges.

Where extensive interaction occurred among internal groups during prospectus building, one would expect attitude changes toward the student-institutional relationship, toward information dissemination and toward involved groups. Project directors were queried about perceived changes in attitude.

Moderately extensive attitude changes toward the student-institutional relationship were believed to have occurred among a limited number of administrative personnel closest to project activities. All of the nine institutions reported a moderate increase in consciousness of professional responsibility toward students among some institutional personnel. One institution reported changes in attitudes toward students among secretarial and support staff; at least two others believed this relationship sufficiently important to contemplate inservice training for secretaries who are a major source of information for students. One community college did include secretaries with professional staff in an inservice workshop. No project director perceived significant attitude changes toward the student-institutional relationship among faculty. Presumably this perception reflects relatively limited involvement of faculty in the process of prospectus building and the fact that many areas of faculty concern -- for example, evaluation of teaching and detailed objectives of courses -- were not included in most prospectuses. Those institutions which involved faculty in even a minimal way reported increased cooperation and collaboration between faculty and administration. Slightly improved relationships were perceived between administration and those students who served as project advisors. But friction sometimes occurred as project directors attempted to strike a balance in information reporting and student groups favored particular types of information to the exclusion of others.

4. Analysis of institutional goals, philosophy, mission and priorities.

Nearly all institutions reported that discussions of mission

statements and attempts to present more precise educational and employment outcomes have caused administrators to become more conscious of institutional strengths and weaknesses. This increased attention to outcomes, moderately important in the group of demonstration institutions as a whole, seems to have been broader in scope among community colleges. As a striking example of change directly attributable to project activities, one community college turned up no potential jobs when examining employment opportunities for a specific paraprofessional program. Consequently, the program will be discontinued. The project director at that institution expects continuing use of placement data to modify curricular decisions.

Despite such an interesting example of self-examination, the extent to which substantial changes in institutional priorities have occurred was reported as moderately low. Only one institution has made a minor reallocation of resources for the future to meet specific needs identified during the project. Many project directors expect that further reallocations will result in a new budget cycle after the prospectus has been utilized for about a year.

5. Restructuring of decision making channels.

Few major changes in internal decision making structures have resulted from prospectus building activities in the demonstration institutions. Influence of this sort seems limited to offices in which college publications are created, with minor changes in other offices concerned with data collection and dissemination. Some institutional research offices have received broader assignments and

one anticipates additional personnel.

Only slight changes in structure or emphasis were reported in admissions offices. Those who cite change toward more assistance to students in making an appropriate choice believe that the change was underway much earlier and, in fact, supported the application to become involved in the Task Force. Most institutions in the project, particularly community colleges with still growing enrollments, and public universities, see their admissions office as a facilitator of applications rather than as an active recruiter of students. One small and new community college reported a major change toward greater service orientation as a direct result of the project, one private liberal arts college and one proprietary school reported slight impact; others attributed no change to the project.

SUMMARY

Although experiments with providing new and different information to students have not been entirely trouble-free, neither has the process proved as difficult as some skeptics predicted. The idea of presenting more candid data about a postsecondary institution, its environment, and its outcomes has been quite readily accepted, at least in those institutions which had already experienced a need for better information.

The process of gathering and disseminating information, as well as deciding what information is important to present, seems to cause little controversy when a variety of campus groups are involved and when strong leadership is provided. Involvement of diverse groups

brings valuable perspective but also makes the process, like many others in academe, slow and cumbersome. The appropriate structure for such an effort, as well as its impact upon the institution, depends upon institutional size, scope of the envisaged information project and the customary degree of participatory governance.

Significant revision of campus information for prospective students requires a substantial allocation of time as well as a commitment to organize the administrative machinery, personnel and broad-based advisory groups necessary to accomplish the task. At most demonstration campuses, early optimistic estimates of completion by mid-year gave way to unremitting time pressures as fall application periods approached. Ultimately, most institutions spent an entire year to develop and produce a model prospectus. Although the time for surveying student needs can now be reduced by using results of Task Force surveys, we would recommend that institutions undertaking a similar task keep their old materials current while the new are being developed.

The institutional changes we have discussed, derived from perceptions of project directors at nine institutions, have been extensive or limited, depending upon the nature of both project and institution. They represent an analysis of change at a stage when prospectuses were just being finished. Much will depend upon the reactions of prospective students to the materials and of those in the campus community who have not been closely involved or even aware of prospectus building efforts.

Major problems encountered by the project institutions included

inadequate availability of data and difficulties in providing proper interpretation of data for prospective students. Yet, desirable outcomes extended beyond the project focus to include greater attention to accuracy in all college publications, increased awareness of professional responsibility to students, improvement in data bases for decision making and, in some institutions, to wider internal sharing of informtion and increased consciousness of institutional strengths and weaknesses. Time involvement in developing the first prospectus is heavy, but provisions can be incorporated for less expensive periodic updates. In its entirety, the effort seems to produce substantially more gains than losses.

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Additional information about the activities of the National Task Force on Better Information for Student Choice may be found in:

El-Khawas, Elaine. Better Information for Student Choice: Report of a National Task Force, March 1977

Stark, Joan S. Inside Information: A Handbook for Institutions Interested in Better Information for Student Choice, July, 1977.

Both volumes will be published by the American Association for Higher Education in 1978.

CHOICE will furnish, upon request, a complete bibliography of Task Force documents.

CHOICE is A Center for Helping Organizations Improve Choice in Education, located in the Department of Higher/Postsecondary Education at Syracuse University and supported by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education.

The goals of CHOICE are:

* to gather and disseminate to institutions current knowledge about the content and process of improving information for prospective students.
* to provide technical assistance to institutions seeking to review and/or improve the current information they provide to prospective students.
* To evaluate the impact of more comprehensive information dissemination on student decision-making and institutional operations.
* to facilitate the involvement of institutions in the development of information policy alternatives for use by both governmental and nongovernmental groups.

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Among the longest-established programs of its kind in the country, Higher/Postsecondary Education at Syracuse prepares professionals for a wide variety of leadership careers in postsecondary education, including positions in colleges and universities, federal and private agencies and foundations, state boards, consortia, and educational research settings.

The Department currently offers the M.S., Ed.D. and Ph.D. although most of the eighty enrolled students are studying for the Ph.D. Academic programs include courses from many departments and other schools and colleges of the university, including the Maxwell School of Citizenship, and the Schools of Public Communication, Law, and Management, as well as specialized work in higher education administration and research. The faculty includes members of the University administration and full time scholars in the field. In addition to teaching, faculty often have grants for research and development projects, such as Project CHOICE, in which students participate.